THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) The number of fishermen arrested during the last three years has been, 85 in 2001, 116 in 2002 and 208 upto July 16, 2003.

(b) As of July 16, 2003, there were nine fishermen in Sri Lankan custody.

(c) Proactive consular efforts to secure the earliest possible release of these fishermen are underway. Our High Commission in Colombo is in contact with the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry and the Attorney General Office for their early release.

UN sanctions on Iraq

1258. SHRI RAJKUMAR DHOOT: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that UNO has lifted the sanctions imposed against Iraq; and

(b) if so, the details of initiatives being taken by Government for investments in Iraq, security of crude supplies to India and export of plant and machinery, agro products, garments, cement, minerals, etc.?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) Yes.

(b) Indian public sector oil companies are pursuing with Iraqi authorities and the national oil company of Iraq to enter into term contracts for security of crude supplies from Iraq to India and for exploration & development of oil fields in Iraq. Government has facilitated Indian companies in assessing export opportunities for exports to Iraq and visits by delegations from apex chambers of commerce have been organized for this purpose to Iraq. Government is also following up with UN authorities for prioritization and implementation of contracts already entered into by Indian companies under the 'Oil for Food Programme'.